

Salmonid Coalition Urban Subcommittee
August 25th - 12 Noon
Sonoma County Water Agency
Santa Rosa, CA
Meeting Notes

Item 1: Introductions

Amy Bolten, Amy Mai, Ann Freelock, Bill Cox, Bill Hearn, Carolyn Wasem, Charlie Carson, Chris DeGabrielle, Darrin Jenkins, David Smith Dick Butler, Erica Phelps, Glen Wright, Jake Mackenzie, Marc Kelley, Mike Ban, Randy Poole, Rob Weinstock and Virginia Porter

Item 2: Rob Weinstock, Dry Creek Valley Vintner

Many of the grape growers in the Dry Creek have lived there for many years. Rob's family has farmed in that Valley for 35 years. Rob is the President of the Dry Creek Agriculture Water Users. All members of the Urban Subcommittee will receive a copy of the Agreement between the County and the Dry Creek Agriculture Water Users.

SCWA proposed and the subcommittee concurred that it will be beneficial to have a representative of the Dry Creek Agriculture Water Users participate in the Salmon Coalition. Agriculture water use, the percentage of land owned by private property owners and issues around disposal of reclaimed water are important to both the ag and urban water users.

Item 3: The Agreement between the Dry Creek Agriculture Users and the Water Agency - Conservation Efforts in Dry Creek

Approximately 8 years ago many Dry Creek vintners began working with the Sonoma County Water Agency to address agriculture water needs and riparian rights in Dry Creek. Needs that have been discussed include: environmental issues, the water needs for agriculture use in the Basin, and the Water Agency's needs to meet urban use.

There are approximately 110 growers within the Dry Creek Basin, and the majority are members of the Dry Creek Agricultural Water Users and thus would be party to the agreement if it is approved by the membership. Most of the property lines go to the middle of the Creek. Under the Agreement

with the Water Agency, agriculture water uses will be metered and reported to the Water Agency on a quarterly basis.

Currently the Water Agency is exploring the viability of establishing weather stations on the Valley floor. The data produced will assist in understanding current and future needs for water. Also under discussion is the impact of pumping ground water that is not immediately adjacent to the Creek.

The Agreement establishes a cumulative authority for water diversions. Currently there are 16 surface diversions – those will be grandfathered under the terms of the Agreement. However, future direct diversions will not be allowed. In terms of water rights, the Water Agency is asking the Water Board to consider the efforts of the Salmon Coalition and the Agreement between the Dry Creek Agriculture Water Users and the Water Agency to resolve the watershed challenges that surround fisheries needs, and agriculture and urban water needs.

Item 4: Working Together to Find Common Ground with the Agriculture Community in Dry Creek and the Urban Needs

The Sonoma County Water Agency and NOAA Fisheries are in the process of developing a Biological Opinion for the 75,000-acre feet of water required for urban uses. At this point, the Water Agency will be required to maintain 80 cfs at the mouth of Dry Creek, with a maximum release of 90 cfs from Warm Springs Dam, unless a slightly larger release is needed to maintain the 80 cfs requirement at the mouth of Dry Creek. With upper Russian River flows measuring at 185 cfs at Healdsburg above Dry Creek, there should be sufficient water to meet the 125 cfs requirement at the Hacienda gage. Collectively there are several issues needing to be addressed in the Russian River watershed:

- Salmonid preservation
- Flood control
- Bank erosion
- Urban water supply needs
- Agriculture water supply needs

One of the options that NOAA Fisheries has proposed is addressing in-stream habitat which will require looking at in-stream improvements to reduce velocity of water coming down Dry Creek in the dry season and provide better habitat within those fourteen miles. However, access and improvement to fourteen miles of continuous stream is problematic.

To implement the in-stream improvements, SCWA proposed the first step in determining conservation needs is to hire a geomorphologist to assess the fourteen miles of Dry Creek. The goal of the assessment would be to provide information on specific sites within the fourteen miles that can be enhanced for salmon habitat improvement and potentially allow for increased flows.

If increased dry season flows are inconsistent with salmon habitat improvement, then the committee may need to look at a pipeline for a solution. Many members of the subcommittee felt strongly that the pipeline is not necessarily as expensive as SCWA estimates, and that implementation should be considered in addition to whatever in-stream low-flow habitat improvements might be needed.

Habitat is a dynamic problem. NOAA Fisheries has indicated that 90 cfs in Dry Creek may be acceptable. However, for Coho we need to provide shelter and velocity refuge as well. The amount of habitat restoration has not yet been determined. In the end, the cfs needed to sustain human activity may require additional conservation and restoration efforts, and alternative conveyance.

Item 5: Maintaining Flow Levels in Dry Creek

The goal is to minimize take such that salmonids are sustained, and the impact on volume, flow and cost for agricultural and municipal water users is minimized. The upper limits of dry season flow in Dry Creek that can be maintained consistent with this goal needs to be identified. NOAA Fisheries added that to achieve long-term persistence, restoration and enhancement has to occur on a comprehensive basis, not just based on concluding a number of projects.

If we assume that 90 cfs is the maximum flow good for salmonid habitat, how do we secure additional water above 75,000 acre-feet? Options exist to decrease flows, and include:

- Changing minimum flow at Hacienda
- Trim the flows in Healdsburg
- Construct a pipeline to bypass some flow around Dry Creek

Another option that needs further exploration includes increasing flows to the point that it provides appropriate habitat for salmonids. If the flow were increased to 210 cfs, there may be a benefit to habitat. The Coalition needs to understand the biology and hydrology of that option, as well as the financial cost to ratepayers.

The Water Agency needs a better understanding of the agriculture demands for water, and the schedule associated with that demand. Additionally, the Agency and jurisdictions need to understand the demand and what each jurisdiction can do to supplement demand in the tight summer months.

Item 6: Other Options - Pipeline

The feasibility of a fourteen-mile pipeline needs to be explored. Impacts to be considered include (partial list):

- Cooperation with private property owners
- Point in the dam that that water would be released
- Impacts to salmonids
- Changes in water temperatures
- Cost associated with construction
- Permitting process
- Erosion control
- Water Temperature

The water project EIR will look at the cost and environmental impacts of the pipeline.

SCWA estimates of costs were characterized by the City of Santa Rosa and others as inflated. Reluctance by SCWA to recognize the pipeline as a viable option has not been fully discussed.

Item 7. Water Release and Habitat Conditions

Several habitat issues need to be addressed in terms of water release from the Dam, and include (partial list):

- Bank erosion – sedimentation and loss of property issues
- Permits – securing permits to restore or protect banks and habitat
- Riparian vegetation encroachment on the channel as a possible cause of flooding
- Army Corps policies and responsibilities – release of water for flood control purposes and the need for the Corps to participate in the mitigation or avoiding flood impacts.

Item 8. Summertime Supplies

An opportunity to work on supply issues and salmonid habitat enhancement and restoration exists among all Coalition members, including the Water Contractors. The SCWA Transmission System Impairment MOU that allocates summertime transmission system capacity to the Water Contractors is due to expire in two years. The Dry Creek property owners can assist by helping the Coalition to understand the water needs so that oscillations can be prevented.

Historically, July is the month of highest water demand. A question was asked: If the Coalition agrees to improvements would NOAA agree to exceed the existing 90cfs during that month? The initial response is that verified improvements would need to accompany any request for additional cfs.

The WAC members agreed to discuss how they might operationally reduce peak demand on the SCWA system.

Item 9. Need for Geomorphologist

As discussions continue regarding the recontouring of Dry Creek, NOAA will need a biologist or geomorphologist to understand baseline data and future conservation and enhancement efforts. WAC members present agreed to discuss the need to fund this individual at its meeting in early October.

A geomorphologist can assist with identifying maximum flows, creation of refuge, habitat restoration and enhancement, and appropriate in-stream

flows. The price tag for these efforts will likely provide some direction: the amount spent on restoration may be tied to the demand for flow.

Item 10. Coordinating Access to Private Property

Access to Dry Creek and tributary landowners needs to be coordinated, so that one individual from one agency makes contact. The Dry Creek Agriculture Water Users will coordinate with Amy Mai from the Water Agency. Amy will put together a letter asking permission for access to land.

Dry Creek Agriculture Water Users will assist in educating its membership re: the need to access private lands, and the formulation of a concise message and description of what will be done.

Item 10. Next Meeting

WAC members need to come to the next meeting prepared to discuss ideas around managing water demand.

The next Urban Sub-Committee meeting will be October 13th – noon at the Sonoma County Water Agency.